

Strategy: Shaping City Character

The Mississippi River. Steep wooded bluffs and ravines. Tree lined streets and parkways. Como. Phalen. Highland. Indian Mounds. Cherokee. Battle Creek. All conjure images of Saint Paul and its neighborhoods. We identify with these images - people, places, events, experiences. These images reflect positively on the quality of life we enjoy--and expect--in Saint Paul. The existing network of parks and parkways in Saint Paul provides a strong foundation to build on, and opportunities to enhance the system must be continually pursued. The Parks and Recreation Division must continue to explore ways to enhance and preserve the City's natural and historic environment and provide opportunities for people to become more aware of the natural and historic environment. The Division must seek out opportunities to make connections and fill gaps in our park and open space system--to ensure park facilities are readily accessible throughout the city. And the Division must ensure that parks fulfill their potential to enhance their surroundings, and the entire city.

Findings:

1. The existing park system contains approximately 4000 acres of parkland, 37 miles of parkways, and 134 buildings. A breakdown of parkland by park type reveals that 65 percent of our parkland is devoted to regional parks, 17 percent community parks, 14 percent neighborhood parks, and 3.5 percent miscellaneous small parks and ornamental spaces. Overall, Saint Paul contributes 26 percent to the total acreage of parkland in Ramsey County.
2. Approximately 11 percent of the total land area of Saint Paul is designated parkland. With the city becoming more fully developed, parkland and open space have become more valuable resources.
3. Between 1970 and 1987 the amount of public parkland increased by almost 24 percent, an addition of 746.9 acres. Much of this land consists of parcels that remained undeveloped because they were difficult or unprofitable to develop. Given limited resources, it is unlikely that the City will acquire large amounts of parkland in the foreseeable future. However, opportunities for acquisition such as abandoned railroad lines and tax-forfeiture properties will continue to be explored.
4. Saint Paul's park system is over 100 years old. While many park facilities (buildings, playgrounds, fields, etc.) have been replaced or rehabilitated through the years, several remain in need of rehabilitation or replacement. The City has a considerable investment in existing park facilities and timely maintenance is essential to ensure that they are utilized to their full potential.
5. The distribution of existing parkland is somewhat uneven due to historical development patterns. Likewise, existing development limits opportunities to acquire vacant parcels of sufficient size to create new parks and open space, particularly in dense, older sections of the city where the need for more open space is greatest.
6. Saint Paul's network of parks and parkways are the outcome of efforts through the years to develop a system of connected parks within the city, including links to the Minneapolis park system. This system provides a strong foundation for further development of our recreational trail system.
7. Local, regional, and state surveys indicate that the popularity of trails and environmentally-oriented activities, such as nature hikes and environmental education, have steadily increased over the past decade.
8. The Mississippi River contributes 29 miles of riverfront shoreline to Saint Paul. This represents the longest stretch of riverfront of any municipality in the country and is one of the City's most significant amenities and resources. Considerable amounts of shoreline consist of public parkland providing opportunities for river access. There are also 57 miles of bluff edges within the city, 30 of which are directly along the river. Looking at the larger Mississippi River Valley, fully one-third of the city, or approximately 18 square miles, is located within the Mississippi River Valley.

9. Saint Paul's park system contains many resources that strengthen our environmental education and interpretive potential. Most notably, the close proximity of Como Zoo and Conservatory offers a unique opportunity to provide a combined botany and zoology program. Other areas containing significant environmental educational resources include: Lilydale, Crosby Farm, Swede Hollow, and Indian Mounds parks.
10. Saint Paul's park system includes structures and landscape features that are historically valuable. Their preservation is important to the continued vitality of the city.
11. In addition, Saint Paul residents benefit from the use of recreational and open space managed by other entities. These include Ramsey County parks, Water Utility open space, Department of Public Works ponding and drainage areas, and private recreation lands.



Mounds Park Overlook

Objective 1: Encourage protection, preservation, and regeneration of the city's open space, natural, and historic resources.

Saint Paul's open space, natural, and historic resources provide many benefits. Undeveloped "natural" areas help shape and soften the built environment, provide habitat for plants and wildlife, and improve the overall environmental quality of the city. However, the amount of open space in the city is limited and vulnerable to increasing development pressures and degradation. While much of our remaining open space is in public ownership, park designation does not necessarily protect it. The Division is continuously confronted with demands to expand recreational opportunities and increase access to developed and undeveloped parkland. Consequently, the city's open space, natural, and historic resources may become vulnerable to unwarranted use and degradation. A conscious and concerted effort must be taken to ensure their protection and preservation for enjoyment by future generations. Because ecological systems are not confined to the City's boundaries, protection and preservation efforts must be coordinated on a regional level.

Policies:

1. Manage the City's park and recreation system to ensure:
 - a. Preservation and restoration of natural resources;
 - b. Management of all parkland and open space in an environmentally sound and sustainable manner;
 - c. Opportunities for all citizens to enjoy, appreciate, and understand the city's natural areas.
2. Provide leadership and coordination with federal, state, regional and local authorities to:
 - a. Complete and maintain an inventory of natural and historic resources, including site analysis and evaluation of integrity and significance.
 - b. Develop management and protection strategies for endangered species and/or sensitive habitats and historically important structures and features;
 - c. Provide adequate and consistent enforcement of regulations to protect water quality, wetlands, native habitats, and the river corridor;
 - d. Open a cleaner and more friendly river to swimmers and other recreational users;
 - e. Pursue the possibility of restoring or reconstructing wetlands within park and open space areas.
3. Pursue opportunities and partnerships to acquire land specifically for open space and natural resource protection according to any of the following criteria:
 - a. Areas containing species included on the State or Federal list of endangered or threatened species;
 - b. Areas representing significant landforms, native plant communities, or sensitive habitat;
 - c. Areas that connect existing components of the open space network; and
 - d. Areas adjacent to existing parkland/open space.
4. Support and strengthen citywide tree preservation and reforestation efforts.
5. Take advantage of opportunities that arise from redevelopment activities to add to or enhance the city's open space and natural resources. Priority will be given to opportunities that do not add publicly-owned and developed parkland that will require additional public maintenance or operating expenses.
6. Work with Ramsey County and others to ensure the highest possible water quality in the city's lakes and streams.
7. Explore use of the following techniques, where practical, to preserve the City's natural resources:
 - a. Use of native species in plantings;
 - b. Use of natural border grasses and plantings along shorelines;
 - c. Control of chemical runoff into ponds, lakes, streams, and rivers;
 - d. Avoidance of "flat mow" grooming in park areas where a more natural look is appropriate.



Controlled Burn

Objective 2: Expand physical and visual access to the River.

The Mississippi River is Saint Paul's foremost natural, historical, and recreational resource. As evidence of that, the entire length of the river in Saint Paul is included in the federally-designated Mississippi National River and Recreation Area. People enjoy the river's picturesque quality and the broad vistas it affords. People want to interact with it directly--to touch it, to explore its banks and currents. While visual access to the river is generally good from public parks and bluff top vantage points, physical access to the river is more limited, particularly in the downtown area, but also in several neighborhoods where two or three-block gaps keep people from getting to the river. Increasing downtown riverfront access has been consistently identified as a priority in the City's extensive planning efforts for riverfront redevelopment and should continue to be pursued. Opportunities for connecting the city's neighborhoods to the river valley should also be explored.

Policies:

8. Pursue opportunities to provide public access to the riverfront in a manner that is aesthetically compatible with the riverfront and protects environmentally sensitive areas.
9. Encourage riverfront development that is environmentally compatible with its history and unique location and fosters a park-like riverfront character, including but not limited to, opening the riverfront to more personal recreation activities like swimming, fishing, and canoeing. Strengthen downtown and neighborhood connections to the River through:
 - a. Completion of riverfront projects which improve access to the River (see Obj. 4, policy 14);
 - b. Preservation and enhancement of significant river and downtown skyline views for the public wherever possible. (Map, p.32)
 - c. Limitations on building heights and setback encroachment in areas that would obstruct public access and views to the River.



Mounds Park Overlook

Objective 3: Develop park and open space connections.

Park and open space connections provide the means for moving between parks, moving within parks, and getting to parks, in a safe, convenient, and enjoyable manner. While connections usually take the form of trails, linear parks or parkways, sidewalks and streets providing access to parks through neighborhoods, are also important connections. As such, it is essential to coordinate and integrate our trails and parkways with the City's network of sidewalks and streets to provide continuous, convenient, and safe access to, between, and within, parks.

Policies:

11. Pursue opportunities to expand the City's recreational trail system and give priority to development of trails which:
 - a. Provide connections between and within the City's parks, trails in adjacent municipalities, and the Regional trail system;
 - b. Coordinate with the network of on-street bicycle lanes and public sidewalks;
 - c. Utilize existing parkways and/or public owned property;
 - d. Complete the principal recreational trail systems in Saint Paul, including the Saint Paul Grand Round Loop, Mississippi River Trails, Capitol Route, and the Phalen Creek Trail (see map, p. 33);
 - e. Provide a north-south bicycle-pedestrian connection (all parkways and boulevards and potential main corridors such as Ayd Mill Road should accommodate bicycle and pedestrian traffic, i.e. Lexington Parkway and Ayd Mill Roadway).
12. Provide recreational trails that:
 - a. Meet or exceed accepted standards for safety, security, durability, maintenance and accessibility as defined by AASHTO (American Assoc. of State Highway and Transportation Officials);
 - b. Meet user needs for support facilities such as lighting, drinking water, restrooms, bike racks, signage;
 - c. Respect and enhance the natural environment;
 - d. Minimize impacts on surrounding neighborhoods.
13. Continue to enhance the City's parkway system through:
 - a. Appropriate design and landscaping;
 - b. Limitations on uses within and adjacent to parkways to ensure compatibility and preserve aesthetic character;
 - c. Limitations on traffic speed and vehicle access;
 - d. Provision of separate paths for pedestrians and bicyclists;
 - e. Provision of on-street bike lanes.



Como Park Pathway

Objective 4: Fulfill park development priorities.

The park system is continually being developed, redeveloped, and rehabilitated. Many projects are necessary to ensure that people have adequate access to quality park and recreational opportunities. Others are necessary to modernize park facilities and ensure that they meet current codes. Park development priorities change through the years as environmental and recreational demands and needs change and the Division must continue to explore opportunities to meet these needs. However, there are some projects

that currently stand out because of their magnitude and potential impact on the entire city and region. To realize these projects, they must become the primary focus of park development efforts and resources in the coming years.

Policies:

14. In the Regional Parks and Open Space System, the City will give priority to all of the following (map, p.34):
 - a. Completion of renovation and improvement of Como Park, Como Zoo, and Como Conservatory;
 - b. Completion of plans to improve the riverfront (see Objective 2, policy 10);
 - c. Development of recreational trails (see Objective 3).
15. In the Local Parks and Recreation System the City will give priority to all of the following (map, p. 35):
 - a. Completion of Community Recreation Centers (North Dale and Battle Creek);
 - b. Focus on upgrading identified *Neighborhoods in Transition* centers;
 - c. Provision of facilities to accommodate emerging sports and other activities;
 - d. Redevelopment of Highland Park;
 - e. Improvement of facilities that support opportunities for coordination and partnership;
 - f. Upgrading of Swede Hollow Park;
 - g. Review of existing demographic and economic data for possible changes to identified *Neighborhoods in Transition* centers;
 - h. Coordinate with Public Works, the state Department of Natural Resources, and the Ramsey-Washington Watershed District in the Phalen/Ames Lake wetland restoration project.
16. Pursue opportunities and joint use partnerships to acquire or provide access to land for parks, open space, or recreation development according to the following criteria:
 - a. Priority will be given to areas that are under-served due to distance to existing parks, population density, or inadequate size and condition of existing nearby park(s);
 - b. Land parcels must be of adequate size to accommodate proposed development;
 - c. Availability and commitment of resources, public and/or private, to develop, operate, and maintain new park facilities;
 - d. Gifts of suitable land will be accepted when resources, public and/or private, are identified to maintain the property;
 - e. Conformity with other applicable public policy.

Objective 5: Enhance the City and its neighborhoods.

Parks and recreation facilities enhance the quality of the City and its neighborhoods. They function as the public's "backyard", giving residents places to play, socialize, and relax. Attractive, well-maintained park and recreation facilities become focal points of neighborhood pride and identity. In some cases, parks can pose concerns for adjacent property owners. Some activities that occur in parks can create noise, traffic, and other problems for adjacent property owners, thereby diminishing appreciation of a park as a neighborhood asset. In addition, the value of parks as neighborhood amenities is directly related to how safe they are perceived to be and how attractive they appear. However, neighborhood concerns about perceived negative impacts, such as when a recreational trail is proposed adjacent to private property, need to be balanced by the recreational needs of the city and region. The City must continue to work to foster appropriate design, maintenance, and community involvement to ensure parks enhance neighborhoods as well as serve the broader public's recreational needs.

Policies:

17. Provide site and facility design, rehabilitation, and retro-fitting that:
 - a. Meets or exceeds accepted standards for safety, security, durability, maintenance and accessibility;

- b. Meets user needs for support facilities such as circulation and parking, lighting, drinking water, restrooms, and signage;
 - c. Respects the natural and historic environment;
 - d. Respects neighborhood identity;
 - e. Minimizes impacts on surrounding neighborhoods.
18. Provide resources to support site and facility maintenance that:
- a. Is appropriate to the size and use of the facility;
 - b. Enhances visibility and attractiveness;
 - c. Maximizes safety and security.
19. Provide resources to ensure timely repair, maintenance, and/or replacement of park facilities to minimize accidents and safety hazards and improve appearance.
20. Involve neighborhood residents, park users, and community groups in planning, development, programming, and maintenance of parks (see Objective 10, policy 42).



Schiffman Fountain

Objective 6: Foster the economic development potential of the City's park and recreation system.

The Saint Paul park and recreation system plays a key role in making the city a great place to live, work, and visit. Parks enhance the physical appearance of the city and contribute to increased property values. Parks provide unique facilities and host a variety of recreational and cultural events that attract people to Saint Paul--to visit, to do business, and to live. In addition, recreation programs and activities help build life-long skills and behavior that foster work readiness and general human development.

Policies:

21. Pursue opportunities to work in partnership with other public and private organizations to program and host public special events.
22. Provide adequate resources for programming and staffing of facilities and events that draw visitors and promote tourism.
23. Encourage programming of downtown and riverfront parks for cultural festivals and other public events.
24. Pursue public/private partnerships to develop mutually beneficial service packages and joint promotional programs.
25. Provide structured recreation activities and community education opportunities that build life-long and work readiness skills.
26. Pursue opportunities to provide family-oriented facilities and attractions that encourage families to spend their leisure time in Saint Paul.
27. Pursue public/private partnerships in regional parks that financially support the adequate maintenance of parks facilities and programming, as long as access to St. Paul regional parks (including Como Zoo and Conservatory) remains free for all.